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ABSTRACT

In this paper the author discusses current practices in speech education courses taught on the junior college level. He examines specific problems that face speech educators who teach in public two-year colleges. The author attributes weakness of speech programs to: (1) inadequate facilities; (2) insufficient full-time staff; (3) oversized classes; (4) deficient number of elective classes; (5) limited number of speech courses; (6) little school-wide emphasis on speech; (7) overloaded teaching schedules; and (8) too few extracurricular activities. He suggests some possible solutions to these problems, which include: (1) development of positive instructor attitudes toward community college teaching, (2) freedom from restrictive procedures and policies, and (3) cultivation of a qualified teaching staff. (Author/LG)

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Trends and Directions in Community College Speech

Roy M. Berko

Eight years ago I signed a contract to teach at a newly formed community college. I signed a contract and received a challenge. The Dean of the college said, "I know nothing about speech, set up a program and make it work!"

Feeling that the program should be based on the experiences of others and the findings of the experts I wrote to the Speech Communication Association, the American Association of Junior Colleges, ERIC, the regional speech associations, and the large universities. I was informed by all of them that there was little or no information available on what was happening in junior-community college speech programs in the United States.

I checked the speech journals and found only a 1931 report on a national survey concerning the junior-community college speech scene. The few other materials available centered on specific narrow fields or specific programs.

Thus, the background was laid for what was to be the topic of my doctoral dissertation at The Pennsylvania State University . . . SPEECH PROGRAMS AT COEDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY-JUNIOR COLLEGES.

It was the purpose of my study to help fill a gap in educational information by collecting, tabulating, analyzing, and evaluating data concerning speech education in community-junior colleges. Specifically, it was to help to ascertain the problems faced by community-junior college speech educators in regard to facilities, programs, administrative restrictions, and staffing, as well as determine if restrictions were

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placed on the speech programs by four-year institutions and what effect these restrictions had on junior college programs. This information revealed trends in the field of community-junior college speech (e.g., teaching methods, curriculum development, and course content).

Attitudes About Speech Programs

There seems to be a positive attitude toward speech and its activity programs at the community-junior colleges. Administrative attitudes toward speech center at the level of extremely positive or positive in over three-quarters of the schools queried. Only two percent indicated a negative reaction by the Administration.

The strengths of the speech programs seem to be credited to: a) the attitude of the teaching staff; b) freedom from restrictive procedures and policies; and the c) quality of the teaching staff. On the other hand, general areas of weakness were attributed to: a) facilities (this was especially true in drama); b) not enough full-time staff; c) classes too large; d) too few elective classes; e) limited number of speech courses; f) little school-wide emphasis on speech; g) heavy teaching loads; h) too few extracurricular activities.

Teaching Methods

About one-fifth of t[illegible]titutions included in the study indicated that they have made no changes in their speech programs in the last five years. Those which have made changes seem mainly to have added courses to the curriculum. There appears to have been little alteration in teaching methodology. This, in spite of the fact that there appears to be little creativity in the instruction within the program. With the impetus for change in education generated by the theories of such writers

as Herbert Kohl, author of The Open Classroom; John Holt, How Children Learn and How Children Fail; Phillips, Dunham, Brubaker and Butt, The Development of Oral Communication in the Classroom; Amodon and Hough, Interaction Analysis: Theory, Research, and Application; and Postman and Weingartern, Teaching As a Subversive Activity and The Soft Revolution, there is still little, if any, evidence of change in the community-junior college classroom. If speech is to become a meaningful experience for the students, investigation of and experiments with newer methods is strongly recommended. Investigations of such methods and devices as optional-grading, optional assignments, independent study, creative projects, team teaching, use of the community outside the campus, life-goal-oriented assignments, dyadic interactions, role playing, and rap sessions are all desirable.

Schools which are located near commercial theatres and/or where communication experts are available and/or where radio and television studios are located, for example, should be using these off-campus sources to give students added experiences. Only 10 percent of the schools studied used guest lecturers to a great or even moderate extent; and only 6 percent used field trips to a great or moderate extent. Institutions are overlooking major sources of outside expertise and the opportunity to add considerably to the education of their students.

It is strongly urged that whatever instructional methods are used that they be evaluated. Each department is urged to ask itself: "What end results do we want from our speech program?" "What specific changes do we want our students to experience as a result of having taken this course(s)?" Once these questions are answered another one should be

asked: "How can we best achieve these ends?" It is counterproductive to continue to teach with methods which fail to aid in reaching the desired goal(s).

One test of the success of a community-junior college program may be, "Is the student the output or is the academics the output?" If the answer is the student then the community college is coming close to reaching its purported purpose.

Course Offerings

In general, there is a narrow range of speech course offerings. A number of schools teach the Fundamentals Course exclusively, while the only other courses taught with any frequency are: Beginning Public Speaking, Oral Interpretation, Debate, Introduction to the Theatre, Play Production, and Acting.

Some restriction on course offerings is due to the necessity of aligning courses to the institutions of transfer. This necessity restricts the individual institutions from offering classes not taught at or accepted by the transfer colleges and universities. These restrictions placed on the two-year college by the four-year institution sometimes makes it almost impossible for the community-junior college to adapt to the needs of its students and the community in which it is located; and ironically it is this adaption which is one of the major purposes for the two-year school.

It may be possible, however, to offer courses which will be accepted by transfer institutions even though the four-year school does not offer these particular courses (e.g., special courses and seminars in specialty areas). Since the majority of the schools in this study

indicated that they do have a liaison relationship with their leading transfer institutions, it is recommended that investigation be made of the possibility of transferring credits for such courses.

With the present stress on the need for meaningful communication there appears to be a necessity to investigate if the potentially important source of communication instruction--the speech program--is fulfilling its obligations to aid a student to better communicate in his society. It would appear that the stress on public speaking, which seems to be the major subject being emphasized in the schools, is questionable as the sole subject to be used to teach life style communication.

Examination of the contents of the most commonly taught course--Fundamentals--indicates that platform speaking, with traditional speech presentation and development, constitutes the bulk of the material being covered in the classes. Presentation of seven to nine formal speeches--the average revealed by the survey--can be an almost meaningless series of exercises unless careful determination of desired outcomes confirms the legitimacy of such exercises. If the major purpose of a speech course is to teach meaningful, oral communication, a question which should be answered by those responsible for the development of the speech program is, "When the students leave this institution after having taken their speech course(s), will they be better able to communicate than when they entered?" Courses offered should demonstrably achieve this end in some realistic fashion, else their legitimacy deserves to be challenged.

Textbook Selection

Textbook selection is a vital part of the speech program. It is imperative that the book be picked with the type of student as well as subject matter to be treated kept in mind. The book should not be chosen just because it is a "prestige" book used by four-year schools or because of the attitude "this is what is taught by four-year colleges and universitites in their courses, so we too should use this book and teach this material.

The textbook selection, the course content, and the methods used will be meaningful only when thought is given to the needs of the students.

Grading

Grading is a persistent problem which appears to have no solution. Colleges are urged to look into various types of grading systems. An investigation of the pass-fail system is encouraged, as is the possibility of optional grading systems.

It seems inconceivable that four percent of the schools surveyed reported that between 75-100 percent of their students failed the Fundamentals Course on the first attempt. A question must be raised as to the methods of grading being used at these institutions, the objectives of the course, the competence of the teaching, and the use to be made of the Fundamentals course. Only madness or some dreadful misconceptions of how and why to teach speech could account for the appalling failure figure.

Speech as a Requirement

Eighteen percent of the schools surveyed indicated that all of their students are required to take a speech course. The data indicate that written English is an almost universal requirement for graduation from two-year institutions. Pressure should be placed on administrators to recognize that an effectively functioning individual in our society must have equal, if not better, skills in oral than in written communication. With the present turmoil over the lack of meaningful oral communication and the "communication gap," it appears that instruction in the art of oral communication is a necessity. It is recommended that speech faculties take a strong stand for the requirement of some type of speech course for all students unless they in some fashion demonstrate that they are already proficient. Some students may resist the requirement of taking such a course, but if optional courses are made available it can be assured that the experience can be beneficial.

Student Involvement in Evaluation

There appears to be only a moderate use of course evaluations to ascertain students' reactions to the classes being taught and the methods used to teach them. Almost one-half of the schools surveyed indicated "no evaluation" or "sometimes evaluations are used". Over 75 percent require no evaluations at all.

It was discouraging, in analyzing the responses to the questionnaire used in this study, to realize that many speech programs were evaluated as meeting the needs of the students without having any apparent proof for this opinion.

It is strongly encouraged that in response to the ever increasing pressure for student involvement in activity programs, an effort be made to open the avenues for students' participation in evaluating and structuring programs and courses.

Teaching Personnel

Ten percent of the people teaching speech at the junior college level have no degree of any kind in speech. One school reported, "Four of us teach speech--none of us has a degree of any kind in speech." It is strongly urged that individuals who are assigned to teaching courses in speech be trained in the discipline. Many schools are staffed by instructors who seem to be holding to traditional speech teaching methodologies primarily because of the lack of updating their educational background.

Many two-year college teachers regard their tenure at the community-junior college as a stopping place between the high school and the four-year school. This is detrimental to the students being serviced by these institutions. The teacher who can best serve this type of student needs a special kind of training and a special type of dedication. The type of instructor who will be successful at the two-year school may not be the type who would or could be successful at a four-year institution.

Those interested in academic research, teaching the more gifted students, and desiring to delve into one specific discipline within the field are better suited to the four-year school rather than the community-junior college.

An attitude of pride rather than defensiveness for teaching at the two-year institution must be developed. The feeling among two-year people that they have "graduated" from high school teaching, but have not matriculated to the lofty level of being a "four-year person" must be eradicated. This negative feeling has even been encouraged by such organizations as the Speech Communication Association which until this year had not truly recognized the two-year college programs for what they are: unique, identifiable, and a viable educational speech training ground.

The two-year college personnel must stop feeling sorry for themselves and realize that they are fulfilling a major function in the educational process and are not the proverbial "low men on the totem pole" of higher education.

It might be asked why there are so few doctoral degree holders on junior college faculties when there seems to be a need for research to find out more about and to develop programs for community-junior colleges. There is also little doubt that doctors aid in raising the prestige level of the community-junior college. Graduate schools train community-junior college speech instructors, trained specialists in community-junior college speech. As it stands, however, the standard requirements for earned doctorates tend to qualify graduates for University teaching and research rather than for teaching and research in two-year colleges.

Teaching Load

Average teaching loads at two-year schools are 15 hours, to which may be addedforensic-debate and/or dramatic extracurricular assignments.

This work load seems to spread the instructor's time and effort so much that he may become ineffective in both of his roles as classroom instructor and extracurricular activity director.

Whenever possible, an instructor's load ought to be so balanced that during those academic sectors (quarter, semester, term) when an instructor is responsible for directing plays, or is busiest with forensics-debate, he is given a lighter classroom load; upon completion of his special assignment, his load ought to be readjusted so as to meet the generally accepted college load practices or agreements. In this way both the curricular and extracurricular programs could be more equitably and probably more prefessionally served.

Class Size

Class sizes, as a whole, appear to be manageable; however, in almost one-half of the schools surveyed, classes fall in the 26 to 40 student range, and in one school class size is as high as 50. It appears unreasonable to expect to develop meaningful student-teacher realtionships in classes of these larger sizes. Class sizes will vary according to the nature of the course, pedagogical practices used, and the philosophy of the individual institution; however, some of the reactions expressed on survey forms indicated that class sizes were unreasonable and that little effort was being made to correct the situation. It should be noted that the survey revealed that class size ranked third on the list of the most serious causes of concern to the respondents.

Research and Publication

The junior-community college is basically a teaching institution. There appears, however, to be a need for some emphasis on research and

publication specifically for this type of institution. As my search of literature demonstrated, there is a minimum of even the most basic data concerning these institutions, their practices and their policies. A sharing of experiences, systematic investigation of pervasive problems, interaction among instructors, research into special methods of instruction, and research to define the unique qualities of the students being dealt with are all examples of professional activities that seem to be legitimate, much needed, but generally missing in junior college information. While the present stress that the junior college instructor is as a teacher and not primarily a researcher is valid, this does not preclude accomplishing some research and carrying out some professional activities.

Special Programs

Few colleges indicated that they offered special speech programs designed for students with low ability, who are culturally or educationally disadvantaged. The responsibility of community-junior colleges is to serve the community, and it is here that untouched possibilities for such service lies. In particular, these colleges seem to offer little in the way of therapeutic or corrective speech services. Here is a specific area in which, if there is need in the community in which the college is located, special contributions could be made by speech departments.

Due to their open door policies and low-level entrance requirements, community-junior colleges draw students who are often deficient in academic skills or who cannot operate effectively in college level courses. It is, therefore, imperative that efforts be made to aid these

students in special ways. Though no empirical proof is available, I contend that an investigation of the causes of the drop-out rate and failure among junior college students would reveal that two of the major factors are difficulty with self-expression and lack of ability to participate verbally in practical, communicative activities of the college environment. The community college speech program has an obligation to aid the student to overcome these communication problems.

Scholarships and Grants-in-Aid

Over 75 percent of the schools surveyed indicated that they offered no scholarships or grants-in-aid for speech and/or drama students. Investigation of the possibility of setting up special activity scholarships is encouraged. Parts of the proceeds from dramatic productions, from selling refreshments at play intermissions, and from other types of fund-raising might be used to set up scholarship funds. Grants-in-aid to students are available for speech and drama assistants through the federal government's work-study program. Institutions should discover and draw upon such resources. Efforts should, of course, be made to equalize, as much as possible, special awards in speech/drama, as is done in athletics, music, and journalism, for example.

Community Service

Though over 90 percent of the surveyed colleges' official policy statements include a statement asserting community-service orientation, only 60 percent relate their speech programs even moderately to the interests and needs of the community to which they are related. Only 25 percent indicated that they felt their curricular speech programs were adapted to the needs of the community in which they were located.

Major forms of community adaptation seem to be made through extracurricular activities. Schools indicated that they were presenting children's theatre, touring theatres, sponsoring high school forensics meets, providing judges for local speech contests, and hosting drama festivals. However, the schools so engaged were in the minority. Efforts should be made, if the community college is to maintain its unique features--community service and open-door policy--to offer more such special services.

Extracurricular Activities

The major recommendation regarding extracurricular programs concerns the institutions' need to evaluate their programs to determine how they fit into the educational philosophy of the institution. Evaluation of theneed or lack of it for a given program could have sweeping ramifications. Institutions might be better off to discontinue programs that do not, in fact, fulfill an identifiable need. On the other hand, if institutions are of the view that extracurricular activities are an important part of the educational life of the junior college student then they should take positive steps to determine what types of programs best fill these needs and to energize such programs immediately. Acceptance of the need leads to an obligation to make it financially possible for the programs to operate effectively.

If it is determined that a program is needed, it is recommended that the entire cost for a student to participate in such an activity should be paid for by the school (e.g., a student participating in a forensics contest should not be required to pay his transportation, meals, housing, or entrance fees). In this way no student will be eliminated from participation because he cannot afford the cost.

It is also recommended that students be included in the operation and decision-making functions associated with speech/drama programs. A student advisory committee should aid in selection of contests and festivals to be sponsored and attended, in setting procedures for participation, and in financial planning for such participation. In addition, students in drama activities should be given a voice in play selection and program planning. All of these functions are, in themselves, important opportunities for training in speech communication and decision making.

National Organizations

Speech Communication Association

At the present time only about one-half of junior college instructors hold membership on the Speech Communication Association. When I wrote the original copy of the study I stated: "An effort should be made to encourage SCA to develop a special division, subdivision, or a commission for community-junior college speech and to make a concentrated effort to offer specific programs for community-junior college instructors at national conventions. Almost 80 percent of those surveyed indicated that they would be in favor of the formation of such a professional interest group." I am pleased that as of last November this problem has been solved.

In addition, it is recommended that regional and state speech organizations be encouraged to expand their present programs to encourage community-junior college representation.

It is encouraging to note that the Winter, 1973, issue of Today's Speech will center on the community-junior college.

Conclusion

The turn of the century marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of higher education in American with the founding of a public junior college at Joliet, Illinois, in 1901. No other type of post-high school institution in this country has experienced a like growth during the first part of the twentieth century. "In March of 1930 it was reported to the American Association of Junior Colleges that there were 429 junior colleges in 46 states enrolling 67,727 students."[1] In 1968, there were 739 public junior colleges in the United States enrolling 1,810,964 students.[2] Public two-year colleges now enroll approximately one-third of the students in public higher educational institutions. If the present trend continues, the number of students will increase until by 1975, one-half of all college freshmen in the country will be attending public community colleges.[3] The significance of the two-year college seems readily apparent. Our major question must be: which way and what role for speech at the community-junior college?

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